

Around the Campus

It has recently been brought to my attention that many of you are interested in hearing about the changes going on around our parish grounds. So, I'd like to take this opportunity to bring you up to date.

PreSchool Classroom Expansion:

Last year around this time, Mrs. Saliba and Mrs. Earp met with me to talk about the possibility of providing an additional classroom for the use of the PreSchool. Mrs. Saliba spoke to the issue of parents, having children already in our preschool (upper grades) and elementary school, looking to enroll siblings in the preschool program. Unfortunately, our program at the lower levels was maxed out, and she had to suggest to parents that they would have to enroll these siblings in another program. If it were possible to create another classroom space, with some "creativity" in rearranging the classes, it would be possible to accommodate some of the parents needs. After consideration and consultation, we agreed that it might be possible to utilize one classroom in the Browning Center as a PreSchool classroom. There were many issues to be considered since it had been a long time since the building was used as a "school": safety and security; bringing the classroom (and eventually the building) to newer DCF, diocesan, and fire codes; and mixed usage of the building (adults and children). Locks had to be changed, doors had to be replaced, lighting had to be updated, and inspections had to be passed by appropriate agencies – each inspection bringing another round of changes and upgrades. Finally, after much work throughout the summer, about two weeks into the current academic year, we received the final approval to begin to use the classroom.

Church HVAC System:

At the beginning of summer, last year, we began to have significant problems with our HVAC system. Expensive repairs were taking place on a weekly basis to keep the system running. One weekend, in mid-July, the system was only running on one of eight compressors, and that one was shutting down due to overload. It had reached the point where repair was no longer possible and replacement was recommended. With diocesan permission, the process was begun to get bids on a replacement system. We discovered that many of the familiar companies were not equipped to replace commercial systems. So, our scope had to be widened to find those that would handle the size of the system we required. In the meantime, we looked to find temporary solutions until we could acquire bids, and get diocesan approval to replace the system. The temporary solution was to "rent" three five-ton "spot cooler" systems to be tied into the existing three a/c systems which were not working. This was a very expensive temporary fix. Eventually, we were able to get three bids, interview the companies and review their recommendations, and make a recommendation to the diocese for a replacement system. This process took us into the late fall. Since we did not want to do the installation during the holidays, installation was scheduled for the first full week of January. Little did we know at the time that Mother

Nature would bring us an unusual winter, and catch us off guard without a heating system while the old units were being dismantled and the new unit installed. Installation was completed by the end of January, and we now have the “happy” problem of finding the right “set point” with a new unit that can make most of our parishioners comfortable.

Cultural Center Roof:

In the aftermath of Hurricane Matthew and Irma, the parish facilities fared pretty well, with one exception. After Irma, it was discovered that the roof of the Cultural Center experienced damage which caused significant leaking in several areas throughout the building. The most severe was around the center of the building where leaking water actually caused chunks of the ceiling to fall to the floor. It was essential that the roof be replaced as soon as possible. Two months ago, that was done, and the interior damage to the Cultural Center ceiling has just recently been repaired.

Columbarium Expansion:

Early last year I became aware of the fact that our columbarium was reaching capacity. In fact, the last niches of the original eight hundred niches had been sold and parishioners were being told that there was no additional availability in our columbarium. The columbarium is a very sacred and holy place for many of our parishioners. On any given day, there is a constant flow of visitors, wishing to spend some quiet time in the presence of the earthly remains of a deceased relative or friend.

I met with our parishioner, Victor Yazbec, and we began to see if it were possible to add additional niches without having to expand the exterior of the columbarium. In reviewing the plans, we were able to identify some interior changes which would enable us to add an additional six hundred niches to the columbarium. The project has taken longer than anticipated as the small company which created the original niches does not keep the exterior plates in stock and has to remake them by hand in order to match the ones currently in the columbarium. Originally, we were told that the production would be complete sometime after the holidays for a January install. However, the manufacturing of the plates took longer than anticipated and only arrived in mid-April. Shortly after arrival, the renovation began, and should be completed within the next week or so. In addition to the six hundred new niches, requiring the installation of a new interior wall, we have also upgraded the electrical, added new lighting, replaced the carpet, and repainted. I think you will be pleased with the final product. If you are interested in acquiring a place in the columbarium, you may do so by contacting the parish office.

Church Renovation:

Two years ago, I established a committee of the Parish Pastoral Council called the “Building & Grounds Committee.” They stated their “Mission & Goal” as follows: *“This committee was formed at the request of Msgr. Brennan to study the existing condition of all buildings, equipment, facilities and infrastructure on the church grounds. Our mission was to inventory the property and determine the short term and long term needs of*

the parish as it relates to the physical plant. The stated goal was to identify the functional longevity of the building structures and mechanical equipment, while determining the need for repair and replacement. In addition, the committee studied all aspects of outward appearance, public safety and the ability to maximize the effectiveness of parish ministries utilizing the spaces assigned for use.”

The end result of the committee, co-chaired by Victor Yazbec and Michael Lenahen, was to provide an excellent, comprehensive report with detailed recommendations for improvement of our campus, both it’s buildings and grounds.

In the Fall of last year, I created a parish committee, called “The Parish Refurbishment Committee.” This committee was charged to follow up on the recommendations of the Building & Grounds Committee report of the Pastoral Council. They were tasked with studying the report, verifying its contents, and providing a plan for its implementation. Victor and Michael reviewed the report with the new committee, walked them through the campus so they would have a good understanding of the needs, and answered their many questions. After a careful and thorough review of our facilities and grounds, the committee recommended to me that our starting point should be with the Church. Their reasoning was it is the weekly central gathering point for our community, and as such should be given the highest priority in attending to its needs.

Having made this decision, I indicated to the committee that I had three desires in moving forward with any church renovation: paint the ceiling to make the room brighter, install a crucifix, and move the Blessed Sacrament from the chapel to the sanctuary. (You notice that I didn’t wait until the renovation to complete one of these!)

Let me guide this account by sharing that my focus in any renovation we might undertake in regard to our church is to create “sacred space.” Sacred space might be defined as an environment which enhances prayer, raises our minds and hearts to God, and gives us a true sense of God’s presence. There is no doubt that “environment” enhances prayer life. Just look at two of the changes we have made already: the installation of the new Stations of the Cross, and the placement of the Tabernacle into the sanctuary of the Church. Two small changes, but ones that have had a significant impact on our community and private prayer. I believe we can do more to bring some aspects of beauty and tradition to our worship space, to have that feeling upon entering that, “wow, God lives here!”

One of our committee members shared that he was able to attend the Mass for the rededication of the Cathedral in St. Augustine after it’s most recent renovation. The renovation was done by Baker Liturgical Arts. (If you haven’t been to the Cathedral lately, I encourage you to visit. The renovation is lovely!) In fact, after that conversation with our parishioner, Bryan Baker visited our church and proceeded to design some sketches of what could be done to enhance our worship space. His drawings were beautiful and attractive, and were enough to give our committee some inspiration as to what we could achieve. Our next steps were to decide whether we hire an architect to guide us through a potential renovation project, or ask a firm like Baker Liturgical Arts to take on the task. We invited Fr. Tom Willis, the pastor/rector of the Cathedral to come to speak to the committee as to the Cathedral renovation and his thoughts about working with Baker Liturgical Arts. Fr.

Willis shared the process his committee had gone through in hiring Baker Liturgical Arts. Fr. Willis had seen the drawings Bryan Baker had provided and indicated two things: first, that he would highly recommend Baker for the renovation, and second, he would implement any one of Baker's sketches "in a heartbeat!" The committee then met with Bryan Baker and spent about an hour listening to him and asking questions. In the end, it seemed to us that Fr. Willis and his renovation committee had done most of the work for us in arriving at a choice. No need to "recreate the wheel." The unanimous recommendation of the committee was that we hire Baker Liturgical Arts to guide us through our renovation.

A contract was prepared, and the diocesan process was followed to acquire the bishop's permission to proceed. The committee has met several times while the contract was being negotiated and signed. With that, we entered into the "design" phase of the renovation. In early March, the committee gave Mr. Baker a list of six "priorities for a Church Renovation" to act as a guide as he began to prepare some designs (In the economy of space, I am not going to include them here, but if you would like a copy, just contact the parish office). Mr. Baker and his architectural staff have met here at the parish several times since our last committee meeting in March. We are now anxiously awaiting the first drafts of his design so that we can begin to make decisions as to the scope (just interior, exterior, or some combination) of the renovation. When that occurs, and we have some sketches, be assured that I will begin to share them with you so that together we can move forward. For the time being, we are in the "Advent" of this project, anxiously anticipating what might come. And so, to conclude, while you might have been hearing about it for a while now, in reality the project is still in its infancy. All we have agreed on are the six priorities which the committee has presented to Mr. Baker. The extent of the renovation is still somewhat of a mystery, even to me! And anything you are hearing, beyond this, is purely rumor or speculation.

One last thing, when we began meeting with Mr. Baker in the Fall of last year, we had to anticipate the need to close the church for some period of time – that time depending on the extent of the renovation. If entirely an interior renovation, then a short time, if exterior renovations were recommended, then a more extended period of time. If we had to close the church, we would need to utilize the Cultural Center as our worship space for daily and weekend Masses for whatever time the Church was not available. At that time in the Fall of 2017, we had weddings booked through August, 2018. We decided that if we were to renovate, we would not then begin until September, 2018 at the earliest. Accordingly, we have not been scheduling activities in the Church or Cultural Center from September and until we have a better sense of when a renovation would be complete.

If you are still reading this, thanks for your attention. I will do my best to continue to keep you informed on a more timely basis as we move forward. If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact me anytime to ask. In the meantime, may I ask for the support of your prayers for our committee, and for the Holy Spirit to guide our discernment.

Sincerely in Christ,
Msgr. Brennan